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THE COLD WAR IS AN OLD WAR

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It is commonly believed that the rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union, known as the "Cold War," began after World War II. Both nations had been allies in the struggle against the Axis powers, but in short time an otherwise friendly Washington had to adopt a "containment policy" in order to counter Moscow's expansionist thrusts and military buildups, or so the story goes.

The truth is something else. The capitalist nations, including the United States, treated Soviet Russia as a threat virtually from the first days of its existence. What is called the "Cold War" is really an old war, a continuation of an antagonism prevailing from the first days of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia in 1917. Long before the Soviets could ever have been a military threat to the West, they posed a *political* threat, the danger of an alternative system. Most Americans remain completely unfamiliar with this history.

In the century before World War II, U.S. rulers had already piled up a record of violent intervention in various countries, starting with the war of aggression against Mexico ending in 1848 that led to the annexation of almost half of Mexico's territory. U.S. expansionists then wiped out the last resistant Native American nations and closed the frontier. Some years later, in 1899-1903, they launched a bloody and protracted war of conquest in the Philippines. U.S. expeditionary forces intervened in China along with other Western armies to suppress the Boxer Rebellion and keep the Chinese under the heel of European and North American colonialists. U.S. marines invaded and occupied Nicaragua in 1912 and again in 1926-1933, Cuba in 1898-1902, Mexico in 1914 and 1916, Panama in 1903-1914, Haiti in 1915-1934, and Honduras six times between 1911 and 1925. So it was not an altogether unprecedented step when the United States joined other capitalist nations in an invasion of revolutionary Russia in 1918.

Years before the Russian Revolution, U.S. officials were taking repressive measures at home against syndicalists, anarchists, socialists, and communists who sought, in the words of one official, to "reduce all economic classes to one dismal level."²³ When revolutionary workers, under the leadership of Lenin's Bolshevik party, seized state power in Russia in 1917, some American labor organizations offered expressions of solidarity.²⁴ But among the moneyed classes of this and other capitalist nations the fear was palpable. The plutocracy's worst nightmare was coming true: here was a successful socialist revolution by the unlettered and unwashed masses against the natural leaders of

society, the persons of talent and property. Unless drastic measures were taken, might not other countries follow suit?

Beginning in August 1918, fourteen capitalist nations, including the United States, Great Britain, France, and Japan, invaded Soviet Russia in an attempt to overthrow the Bolshevik government. In addition to using their own troops, they provided aid to the reactionary pro-czarist White Guard armies. To justify their action, Western leaders initially announced that the intervention was an attempt to keep Russia in the war against Germany. But the World War ended shortly after the invasion, yet the allies continued in their military campaign against the Bolshevik government for almost another two years. Western rulers also announced that the invasion was an attempt to rescue Czech prisoners-of-war marooned inside Russia. But the plight of the Czech prisoners developed well after the decision to intervene had been contemplated and was seized upon more as an after-the-fact excuse, a rather lame one at that.²⁵

In truth, the allied leaders intervened in revolutionary Russia for the same reason conservative rulers have intervened in revolutionary conflicts before and since: to protect the existing social order. Recall how various European monarchs colluded against the French Revolution at the end of the eighteenth century. All the bitter rivalries that plagued the courts of Europe weighed less than the aristocracy's shared interest in class survival. Recall also, almost a century later in 1871, how Bismarck mobilized the same French army he had just defeated so that it could be used by the French ruling class against the revolutionary workers of the Paris Commune.

Likewise, after the 1918 armistice, the victorious Western allies allowed the German militarists to retain 5,000 machine guns to be used against German workers "infected with Bolshevism." The allies made clear that they would not tolerate a socialist workers' government in Germany nor permit diplomatic relations between Berlin and the newly installed Soviet government in the Kremlin."²⁶

While President Woodrow Wilson contemplated sending American troops to Russia, his secretary of state, Robert Lansing, recorded in a confidential memorandum the administration's concerns. Lansing perceived Lenin and the Bolsheviks to be revolutionary socialists who sought "to make the ignorant and incapable mass of humanity dominate the earth." The Bolsheviks wanted "to overthrow all existing governments and establish on the ruins a despotism of the proletariat in every country." Their appeal was to "a class which does not have property but hopes to obtain a share by process of government rather than by individual enterprise. This is of course a direct threat at existing social order [i.e., capitalism] in all countries." The danger was that it "may well appeal to the average man, who will not perceive the fundamental errors." The Bolsheviks appealed "to the proletariat of all countries ... to the ignorant and mentally deficient, who by their numbers are urged to become masters." Furthermore, the Bolsheviks had actually "confiscated private property" in Russia. For the patrician Lansing, Bolshevism was the "most hideous and monstrous thing that the human mind has ever conceived."²⁷

General Alfred Knox, chief British military advisor in Russia, warned: "Distribute the land in Russia today, and in two years we'll be doing it in England." The U.S. ambassador to Russia, David Francis, urged armed intervention because the socialist elements organized into councils or *Soviets* "composed of workingmen and soldiers ... are advocating abolition of classes and the right of soldiers to disobey their officers."¹⁸

Concerned that the allied invasion would be ineffective, President Wilson was more hesitant to intervene than some other leaders. But he never made secret his distaste for the Bolsheviks. He told British leaders that he supported intervention even "against the wishes of the Russian people knowing it was eventually for their good... ." ²⁹ Wilson dreaded the doctrine of social equality posed by the Russian Revolution and the effect it might have in other countries. Some of his worries about class (and racial) leveling were recorded by his physician:

[President Wilson was concerned] that if the present government of Germany is recognizing the soldiers and workers councils, it is delivering itself into the hands of bolshevists. He said the American negro returning from abroad would be our greatest medium in conveying bolshevism to America. For example, a friend recently related the experience of a lady friend wanting to employ a negro laundress offering to pay the usual wage in that community. The negress demanded that she be given more money than was offered for the reason that "money is as much mine as it is yours."³⁰

Wilson also feared that Bolshevism would affect the way business in America was conducted; business leaders might have to accede to having workers on their boards of directors, and other such scandalous arrangements.³¹

The class nature of the allied invasion of Soviet Russia became apparent to some of the invaders themselves. Members of the expedition to Archangel, in Northwestern Russia, observed that the cheering crowds greeting the British and American troops "consisted entirely of the bourgeoisie and that there was not a workman to be seen."³¹ A British colonel stationed in a Siberian urban center angrily complained that "the [Russian] bourgeoisie makes one almost a Bolshevik oneself." In a town "full of quite rich people" not one of the affluent residents dreams of sparing just an hour to meet the trainloads of wounded and offer them a cup of tea. Instead they go "nightly to the opera and then on to dance or what not until four or five even."³³ An American sergeant in Murmansk registered his loathing for the "lying, thieving, murdering, tsarist army officials who keep their people in this ignorance and poverty." Most of the Russian people, he maintained, were in sympathy with the Bolsheviks "and I don't blame them."³⁴

The allied intervention involved hundreds of thousands of military personnel. U.S. participation was more than "token" (as it was falsely described in subsequent years). U.S. troops in Siberia and in Archangel and Murmansk conservatively estimated at 40,000, not counting naval forces, engaged in extensive hostilities and suffered several thousand casualties, including 436 fatalities. American and other allied troops participated regularly in atrocities. Widespread pillaging and killing of civilians, including the massacre of thousands of Jews, were carried out by the reactionary White Guard armies. The White armies were assisted by a German expeditionary force under General Von der Goltz, who, with U.S. and British funding, joined his former adversaries against the common class enemy. Von der Goltz reportedly executed 3,000 persons in Riga alone.³⁵

By 1919, the White Guard armies were wholly dependent on American and British financial aid. In a report to Congress in January 1921, Herbert Hoover admitted that humanitarian relief funds voted by Congress to feed starving civilians had been used by him to supply these armies. Hoover withheld aid intended for Hungary until the short-lived revolutionary Bella Kun government was overthrown and Admiral Worthy was installed, backed by the bayonets of a Romanian army that executed hundreds of revolutionaries and Hungarian Jews. Hoover also placed large sums at the disposal of Polish militarists to support their invasion of Soviet Russia in April 1920.³⁵

Russia's immense natural wealth was very much on the minds of Western investors. Corporate investments in the country were slated to be nationalized by the Bolsheviks. Hoover alone had secured a major interest in no less than eleven Russian oil companies. Wherever the allied armies invaded, they were followed by Western business people. Coal, grain, timber, ores, furs, gold, oil, and machinery were extracted from the occupied areas and shipped to capitalist countries.³⁷

During the 1980s, millions of Americans were treated to movies like *Red Dawn* and *Invasion USA* and television series like ABC's *Amerika*, which portrayed imaginary Soviet invasions of the United States. Most Americans would probably have been surprised to hear that in real life the reverse had happened. Even some of our presidents seemed unaware of the real history. Appearing on Soviet television while on a visit to the USSR in 1972, President Nixon announced: "Most important of all, we have never fought one another in war." In his 1984 State of the Union message, President Reagan

said the same thing: "Our sons and daughters have never fought each other in war."³⁸ The Soviets, of course, remembered it differently.

In the United States one must search hard for historians and political scientists who have given attention to the West's invasion of revolutionary Russia. The scholarly literature is meager. Little mention, if any at all, of this extraordinary episode is made in textbooks and mainstream media. But imagine the treatment had it happened the other way around. Suppose that in 1920 or so, the young Soviet government had sent an expeditionary force across the Bering Strait down to Seattle, Portland, and California, in support of American strikers and labor agitators. Imagine that for two years this expeditionary force engaged in pitched battles, massacred many thousands of our citizens and destroyed properties, farms, and homes before being forced to retreat back to Russia. We would still be hearing about it in books, movies, and documentaries, and it would have remained a subject of lively study in U.S. schools from the first grade up through the doctoral level. Politicians and pundits would still be treating it as everlasting proof that Moscow was out to get us. But since the invasion happened the other way around, hardly any Americans have been informed of it.

The antagonism that plutocrats, presidents, prime ministers, and popes displayed toward Soviet Russia persisted through the two decades after World War I, in marked contrast to the forbearance and even admiration shown toward the fascists in Italy and the Nazis in Germany. While Hitler and Mussolini sent troops and armaments to help Generalissimo Franco crush the Spanish Republic in 1936-39, the United States, Great Britain, and France maintained an embargo against that beleaguered democracy, effectively contributing to its defeat. The Soviet Union and Mexico were the only nations to aid the Republic. Soviet shipments had to run a gauntlet of German and Italian submarines, with a loss of tons of munitions and arms, while the French government blocked Soviet overland deliveries into Spain. But fuel supplies from U.S. companies continued to flow to Franco's invading army.³⁹ Western leaders preferred to see Franco's fascist dictatorship installed in 1939 rather than risk the survival of a democratic republic that seemed to be moving too far to the left.

When Hitler annexed Austria in 1938, the Western leaders acted as if nothing too terrible had happened. With the active cooperation of U.S. officialdom, American corporations continued to expand their investments in German heavy industry and arms production.⁴⁰ That same year, British and French leaders hurried to Munich to grant Hitler his claim to the Sudetenland, the heavily industrialized western portion of Czechoslovakia that contained a large German population. Less than half a year after Munich, Hitler marched his troops into all of Czechoslovakia. The day after this takeover, British leaders handed the Nazi dictator millions in Czech gold that had been deposited in the Bank of England.⁴¹

Some Western leaders had hoped to direct German expansionism eastward against the Soviet state. With few exceptions, they were more concerned with the Bolshevik specter than the fascist reality. They grew increasingly uncomfortable about Hitler's emergent power but they did not look upon fascism with the same fear and loathing as they did communism. Unlike the communists, the fascists were not a threat to business enterprise; if anything, the fascists had crushed worker organizations in Germany and Italy and had made those countries safer and more profitable than ever for private capital.⁴¹

Furthermore, the ruling circles in the West saw Hitler as a bulwark against communism in Germany, and Nazi Germany as a bulwark against communism in Europe. Their collaboration with Hitler has since been condemned as "appeasement." More accurately it was an active complicity born of a mutual class hatred for revolutionary socialism.⁴³ For western leaders the goal was to get the Nazis to attack the Soviets. At the same time, the United States and Great Britain did little to deter Japan's aggressions in Manchuria and China. Here too the anticipation was that Tokyo might eventually move against the USSR, as indeed occurred. In 1938, Japan entered an "Axis alliance" with Germany and Italy (the Anti-Comintern Pact), explicitly avowing a joint struggle against "World Communism."

Japanese imperial forces then attacked the Soviet Union near the Outer Mongolian area, only to be beaten back with heavy casualties.

Repeated overtures by Moscow to conclude collective-security pacts with the Western democracies in order to contain Axis aggression were rebuffed, including Soviet attempts to render armed assistance to Czechoslovakia. Frustrated in its attempts to form an anti-Nazi alliance, and believing (correctly) that it was being set up as a target for Nazi aggression, the USSR signed an eleventh-hour nonaggression treaty with Hitler in 1939 to divert any immediate attack by German forces.

To this day, the Hitler-Stalin pact is paraded as proof of the USSR's diabolic affinity for Nazism and its willingness to cooperate with Hitler in the dismemberment of Poland. Conservative news columnist George Will was only one of many when he mistakenly described the Soviet Union as a regime that was "once allied with Hitler."⁴⁴ The Soviets were never allied with Hitler. The pact was a treaty, not an alliance. It no more denoted an alliance with Nazism than would a nonaggression treaty between the United States and the Soviets have denoted an alliance between the two. On this point, British historian A. J. P. Taylor is worth quoting:

It was no doubt disgraceful that Soviet Russia should make any agreement with the leading Fascist state; but this reproach came ill from the statesmen who went to Munich [The Hitler-Stalin] pact contained none of the fulsome expressions of friendship which Chamberlain had put into the Anglo-German declaration on the day after the Munich conference. Indeed Stalin rejected any such expressions: "the Soviet Government could not suddenly present to the public German-Soviet assurances of friendship after [we] had been covered with buckets of filth by the Nazi Government for six years.

The pact was neither an alliance nor an agreement for the partition of Poland. Munich had been a true alliance for partition: the British and French dictated partition to the Czechs. The Soviet government undertook no such action against the Poles. They merely promised to remain neutral, which is what the Poles had always asked them to do and which Western policy implied also. More than this, the agreement was in the last resort anti-German: it limited the German advance eastwards in case of war. . . . [With the pact, the Soviets hoped to ward] off what they had most dreaded—a united capitalist attack on Soviet Russia. ... It is difficult to see what other course Soviet Russia could have followed.⁴⁵

When Hitler attacked Poland in September 1939, thus setting off World War II, the Soviets moved into Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, the Baltic territories that had been taken from them by Germany, Britain, and Poland in 1919. They overthrew the pro-fascist dictatorships that the Western powers had installed, and incorporated the Baltic States as three republics of the USSR. The Soviets also invaded and annexed eastern Poland. This has been portrayed as proof that they colluded with the Nazis to gobble up that beleaguered nation, but the Soviets reoccupied only the land that had been taken from them by the Polish dictatorship in 1921: Western Byelorussia, the Western Ukraine, and some other areas. History offers few if any examples of a nation refusing the opportunity to regain territory that had been seized from it. In any case, as Taylor notes, by reclaiming their old boundaries, the Soviets drew a line on the Nazi advance which was more than what Great Britain and France seemed willing to do.

When Hitler subsequently invaded France and then the Soviet Union, he forged in war the East-West alliance that London and Washington had repeatedly rejected and Moscow had long sought. But even then British leaders seriously considered coming to peace terms with Berlin so that they might make common cause with the Nazis against their real *bete noir*, Russian Bolshevism.⁴⁶ For instance, while ostensibly at war with Germany, British Tory leaders sought passage of Allied forces through Scandinavia and Finland in order to launch an attack against the Soviet Union— an action Churchill supported even after the Finns had signed a peace treaty with Moscow in March 1940 and at a time when the Nazis were overrunning Europe.⁴⁷ As in earlier years, the British elites were more concerned with undoing the Soviets than with stopping the Nazis. Most British and American accounts of the war ignore the major role played by the USSR in Nazism's defeat, and the horrendous losses in life and property sustained by the Soviets fighting a war that was many times greater than anything on the Western front. More than 80 percent of all German casualties were sustained on the Russian front.⁴⁸

Well before hostilities ceased, the West was preparing to resume the crusade to make Eurasia safe for capitalism. Kim Philby, the British agent who defected to the USSR, reports that between the wars, the greater part of British intelligence's resources were "devoted to the penetration of the Soviet Union." When the defeat of the Axis was in sight, British espionage focused once again on "Bolshevism."⁴⁹

The August 1943 minutes of the combined chiefs of staff, made public in London and Washington in 1970, reveal that ten months before the end of hostilities in Europe, "military strategists discussed the possibility of repelling the Russians if they suddenly began overrunning Nazi Germany." Both U.S. chief of staff General George Marshall and British chief of staff Sir Alan Brooke were interested in ascertaining whether Germany would help allied troops enter Europe "to repel the Russians."

On the eve of the first atomic test, President Truman's first thoughts were of the Russians: "If [the atomic bomb] explodes, as I think it will, I'll certainly have a hammer on those boys." According to one visitor, Truman asserted that "the Russians would soon be put in their places" and that the United States would then "take the lead in running the world in the way that the world ought to be run."⁵⁰ General Groves, head of the Manhattan Project that developed the bomb, testified: "There was never—from about two weeks from the time I took charge of the project—any illusion on my part but that Russia was the enemy and that the project was conducted on that basis."⁵¹

The conventional explanation of how the Cold War began, the one given to the U.S. public is something else. As pronounced by Mose Harvey, a member of the State Department's Policy Planning Council: "The Soviets had chosen to, as it were, declare war on us—much to our surprise. We had little choice but to concentrate on the various threats thrust before us."⁵² Of the various threats, the most menacing was said to be the Red Army itself, massively arrayed across Central Europe at the end of World War II, supposedly deterred from invading the West only by U.S. possession of the atomic bomb. As Winston Churchill asserted, "Nothing preserves Europe from an overwhelming military attack except the devastating resources of the United States in this awful weapon."⁵³

Worse still, while the United States engaged in large-scale demobilization after the war, the Soviets purportedly retained their forces at full strength. Political scientists Arora and Lasswell claim: "There was, in fact, a period of such rapid withdrawal of American forces abroad that communist forces were given a new lease on life in many countries."⁵⁴ It is not clear where the rapid U.S. withdrawal took place; certainly not from West Germany, France, Italy, Austria, Korea, or Japan, nor from the hundreds of U.S. military bases that were being set up around the world, nor from the seas and oceans patrolled by U.S. fleets, nor from the many newly constructed U.S. air bases with their long-range bombers armed with nuclear bombs.

It is true that Western armies were not kept anywhere at wartime strength. The same holds for the Red Army. By 1948, the USSR had demobilized its forces from 11.3 million to 2.8 million and had withdrawn its troops from Manchuria, Korea, Norway, Denmark, Austria, and elsewhere. Most Western observers now agree that the Red Army's strength was "considerably exaggerated in the West during the early postwar years."⁵⁵ Soviet divisions were much smaller and lacked the extensive logistical supports of Western divisions. Also, a large portion of the Red Army was composed of noncombat units engaged in mending the extensive war damage, rebuilding industries and housing complexes.⁵⁶

The Soviets lost more than 22 million citizens in World War II, and suffered massive destruction of its cities, utilities, industries, railways, bridges, and collective farms.⁵⁷ Following a trip to the USSR in 1947, British Field Marshal Montgomery wrote to General Eisenhower: "The Soviet Union is very, very tired. Devastation in Russia is appalling and the country is in no fit state to go to war."⁵⁸ While U.S. cold warriors took steps to remilitarize Germany and form a military pact of Western nations (NATO), a CIA report stated: "There is no conclusive evidence of Soviet preparation for direct

military aggression during 1949."⁵⁹ Yet the threat was conjured for decades to justify U.S. military build-ups in Europe and elsewhere. Recent research indicates that top U.S. defense officials in the postwar era did not expect a Soviet military attack. Their real fear was that they would lose control of Europe and Asia to socialist revolutions caused by widespread poverty and economic instability.⁶⁰

If our rulers were capable of misleading us for so long about Soviet intentions and capabilities in order to justify their own expansionist policies during the postwar era, is it not unreasonable to entertain the possibility that they are capable of misrepresentations today about other "mortal threats" and "adversaries?"

Endnotes:

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- 26 Gardner, *Safe For Democracy*, 198-200.
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- 28 Quotations from Gardner, *Safe for Democracy*, 133-134, 148, 151.
- 29 Both Wilson quotations from Williams, "American Intervention," 61 and 57 respectively.
- 30 Gary Grayson's diary, quoted in Gardner, *Safe For Democracy*, 242.
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- 33 Dobson and Miller, *The Day They Almost Bombed Moscow*, 239-240.
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- 39 Arthur Landis, *Spain, The Unfinished Revolution* (International Publishers, 1975)-
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- 41 See Jacob Oser's essay in Judith Joel and Gerald Erickson, eds., *Anti-Communism: The Politics of Manipulation* (Marxist Educational Press, 1987)
- 42 See herein selection 36, "Fascism, the Real Story."
- 43 For a superb history of the politics behind Munich, see Clement Leibovitz, *The Chamberlain-Hitler Deal* (Les Editions Duval, 1993).
- 44 See Will's columns in the *Washington Post*, 16 November 1986, also 21 May 1987.
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- 46 Well demonstrated by Leibovitz, *The Chamberlain-Hitler Deal* passim.
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- 48 John Newsinger, "Churchill: Myth and Imperialist History," 56-57; and Clive Ponting, *Churchill* (Sinclair Stevenson, 1994).
- 49 Kim Philby, *My Silent War* (Ballantine Books, 1968), 101.
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- 51 Quoted in Bert Cochran, *The War System* (Macmillan, 1965), 4Z-43.
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- 59 Evangelista, "Stalin's Postwar Army . . .," 134.
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For home

